

Policy options for social integration

Richard Falk

Introduction

The emphasis given to 'social integration' at the Copenhagen Social Summit was one of the most innovative features of the entire gathering, and the project for its gradual realisation is probably the most ambitious of all the undertakings agreed upon and incorporated into the Final Declaration and Programme of Action. In its essence, the near universal affirmation of social integration in these formal UN documents represents an impressive commitment by the official leaders of the overwhelming majority of people on earth. The core of this commitment is to work toward a social order based on the full implementation of human rights for all members of society. This implies a form of governance that ensures effective and inclusive participation in a democratic spirit, and an overall atmosphere of tolerance and respect for diversity in all its forms while vigorously upholding a commitment to equality and equity regardless of cultural, ethnic, and religious identity.

The achievement of Copenhagen was to agree in a global forum of such stature to affirm this normative idea of what constitutes 'a good society' at this point in human history. The means specified for putting this idea into practice were left rather vague in the Programme of Action, and meeting the challenge of

implementation was entrusted almost entirely to governments operating at the level of the state. The only international actions proposed were of a hortatory nature, encouraging states to do more by way of accepting treaty commitments in the area of human rights, to be more forthcoming with respect to the care and funding of refugees, and to work more cooperatively with one another based on an ethos of equality and mutual respect.

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There is some danger that social integration as a basis for policy will be dismissed as too vague, and even self-contradictory. As with international human rights as initially enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there was widespread initial scepticism because many of those agreeing upon the framework in 1948 were representing societies that were highly oppressive, and also because the Declaration

avoided altogether the issue of enforcement. In a sense, this comparison is a source of encouragement because now, more than 50 years later, there has been impressive progress nationally and internationally in placing human rights on the global policy agenda and steadily improving prospects for their implementation in many arenas. This progress owes much to the activism of civil society.

One contribution that can be made within the United Nations System, in its many arenas,

is to give the idea of 'social integration' salience and support, partly by endorsing its positive and inspirational role and partly by encouraging its further exploration and articulation, including the depiction of 'next steps', especially in settings of inter-cultural dialogue. The evolution of the idea will encourage various movements and campaigns to pursue their ends and devise their tactics with the language and substance of social integration in mind. The widespread endorsement at Copenhagen provides an inter-cultural foundation for such a path of evolution, especially as the terminology of social integration is mostly free of ideological baggage and of identification with any single country or cultural group. In this respect, then, the various dimensions of social integration provide an important vehicle for the realisation of what has elsewhere been called 'humane governance' (Falk 1995; also Commission on Global Governance 1995).

In approaching policy options in relation to social integration for the near future it seems beneficial to clarify some of the obstacles that persist and then identify some hopeful tendencies that may enable them to be overcome, or at least their impact diminished. There is a central ambiguity implicit in this affirmation of social integration as a normative idea: it can be appreciated both as an empirical trend, as in connection with the elaboration and attainment of human rights, as a practical proposal as in the call for greater assistance to refugees, and as a utopian expectation as expressed in the Programme by reference to the 'urgent need' for 'the elimination of violence in all its forms'. In this article, addressed to policy options, attention will be given only to the first and second dimensions of social integration as the idea was expressed in the Copenhagen documents.

The further objective of identifying policy options for 'social development' needs also to be treated as a limiting factor. Such analysis, given the predominance of the state in the setting of social development for most parts of the world, must necessarily concentrate on what can be done by national governments. At the same time, a characteristic of this era of globalisation is the extent to which the diffusion of normative ideas, as well as resistance to such diffusion, is a global phenomenon that exerts an uneven

influence on the peoples of the world and their leaders. Also, particularly in Europe, but also in other regions of the world, cultural wholes are exerting an increasing influence on the normative climate, which in turn shapes the policy agenda, including the allocation of resources to facilitate the material aspects of social development.

Normative obstacles

In contemplating policy options for social development in relation to promoting social integration it is important to take some account of trends and ideas that run counter to the ethos of Copenhagen. These obstacles are alluded to in the Programme itself under the rubric of 'negative developments' (p. 68). This acknowledgement is important, to spare the whole process of advocacy from allegations of 'empty promises', utopianism, and apolitical sentimentality. The relevance of obstacles is especially pronounced with respect to policy options, which are above all efforts to frame potential action within the horizons of realistic and reasonable expectations.

One of the most serious obstacles to achieving social cohesion is the interplay of territorial sovereignty as a basic element of world order and the sort of fragmentation associated with ethnic, religious, and cultural backlash reactions to the homogenising impacts of globalisation (Clark, 1997). This strengthening of particularistic and often exclusivist identities works against the virtues of tolerance, respect for diversity, and inclusivity, which is appropriately placed at the very centre of political arrangements for social cohesion. Recent intensification of multi-dimensional fragmentation in a variety of societal settings is perceived by many governments as proposing profound threats to the territorial unity of the state, often stimulating repressive moves in response that are justified as necessary to quash separatism and the associated prospect of the dismemberment of the state. Such a dynamic of action and reaction imperils most efforts to promote human rights, particularly for minorities and subordinated groups, and especially if these collective identities are being invoked as alternatives to the existing state. For social integration

to proceed in the next century, this issue of balancing the stability of state structures with respect for diversity, and even with degrees of devolution of authority, will need to find new and convincing forms of reconciliation in a wide range of varying circumstances. Although the widespread character of political fragmentation supports the view that structural factors are involved, each situation needs to be appreciated in relation to its distinctive contextual features.

The most severe class of instances involving fragmentation is associated with the problem identified as that of 'failed' or 'collapsed' states, that is, situations in which governance is no longer able to safeguard the citizenry on the most basic levels of security and provision of basic human needs. Where fragmentation is intense and is accompanied by rivalry for control over state structures, the results can be catastrophic for the population, including prolonged civic violence with genocidal dimensions and widespread famine and disease. Such tragedies have occurred repeatedly during the 1990s, afflicting particularly countries that are already economically disadvantaged. Several countries in sub-Saharan Africa have experienced a virtually total breakdown of this kind.

After some initial efforts by the United Nations to extend peacekeeping to these essentially internal situations, there has been a definite trend toward aloofness of external actors. This disengagement reflects a realisation that leading states do not have the political will that is needed for the success of humanitarian diplomacy under UN auspices (Cahill 1993). The inability of the United Nations to fashion responses has contributed to a considerable loss of confidence in its capacity to deal with these problems (Rieff 1993). Indeed, the UN was established without any regard to its potential responsibility for addressing these extreme breakdowns of the state.

A closely related realisation is the extent to which international support for social cohesion must continue to take a back seat to the priorities of geopolitics. The low level of commitment of resources and lives to the agenda of humanitarian concerns, despite the record levels of economic growth achieved by the richer countries, confirms the realist view that only the presence of strategic interests

provide a basis for large-scale collective action, which is costly and risky. It should not be assumed that these challenges could be dealt with effectively even if the political will were to be mobilised; projects of intervention, even if truly 'humanitarian', that is, without notable selfish motivations, have proved exceedingly difficult to complete successfully.

There is a second dynamic associated with globalisation that also seems to work against the proclaimed commitment to social integration. Globalisation is a shorthand expression for a potent combination of technologies, organisational moves, and animating ideas (Castells 1996–98). In this regard many indicators of human well-being have definitely suggested dramatic progress over the course of recent years, but there has also accumulated overwhelming evidence of sharply increasing inequality within and among states (Human Development Reports, 1997, 1998). The widening of such gaps, together with extraordinary concentrations of wealth in rich individuals, disrupts community sentiments and weakens the social fabric upon which cohesion depends. What is perhaps most serious, the prevailing ideas associated with global economic policy encourage privatisation of as many functions of government as possible, and a great trust in the beneficial social consequences of minimally regulated markets. The impact of this group of ideas has been to exert a steadily downward pressure on the availability of public goods at both national and international levels, with serious consequences for public health, environmental protection, poverty alleviation, higher education, and non-commercial cultural activities. As a result, all direct efforts to provide help to marginal and vulnerable segments of the citizenry have encountered strong opposition in recent years. In this respect, some of the most clearly articulated goals of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme in the domain of social integration seem definitely at odds with the dominant mood of economic globalisation. Such a tension, if left unresolved, invites the perception that the Copenhagen commitments were never meant to be taken seriously as policy options.

Mitigating circumstances

Despite the seriousness of the obstacles depicted in the prior section, there are grounds for modest hope.

The legitimacy imperative

In the period since the end of the cold war there has emerged a consensus that conditions full membership in global society on being regarded as a legitimate state (Franck 1990). The character of legitimacy is not sharply delineated, but relates to support for human rights and democratisation. In operative terms, only a governing process that is widely viewed as illegitimate is subject to community sanctions. The most prominent example remains the sanctioning of South Africa during apartheid, but the sanctions imposed on Iraq since the end of the Gulf War also represent a controversial extension of this tendency. There is little doubt that the appeal to legitimacy is linked to the continuing dominance of geopolitics at the political level. At the same time, moves toward the view that the way a government treats its own citizens can be the basis of favourable or unfavourable responses by other actors in the UN system, including those dispensing credit and loans, gives some weight to legitimacy as an element in international life, qualifying the view that only the interests of states count on an international level.

Beyond this, the internationalisation of norms associated with legitimacy sends a signal to those within opposition ranks throughout the world, that resistance to denials of human rights and infringements on democracy is appropriate. In effect, civil society can be mobilised around the idea that citizens have a responsibility to establish a legitimate state within territorial limits, and this exerts pressures countervailing those that arise from efforts to control diversity and constrain pluralism. As a result, the dangers associated with fragmentation, and its encouragement of exclusivist political movements may be to some extent mitigated.

An important aspect of the legitimacy imperative is its encouragement of democratic elections that can pass a test of fairness as administered by a range of generally respected civic society entities. Jimmy Carter has played

a significant role in certifying electoral outcomes in many countries, as have entities such as the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA), a Swedish initiative that has been promoting the idea that a fair, internationally monitored electoral process is the most important means of satisfying the legitimacy imperative. To a degree difficult to assess, these efforts are useful steps for establishing a climate conducive to social integration.

Compassionate globalisation

The financial crisis that started in a series of Asian countries in mid-1997, and later spread to several other very important states, has encouraged a more cautious attitude in many circles about relying on the market to solve societal problems. Even the Bretton Woods institutions have passed from a posture of unconditional endorsement of an economicistic approach to efficiency and growth to a more nuanced, balanced, and socially sensitive outlook. This includes a measure of self-criticism in relation to the earlier championship of fiscally conceived approaches to development that were myopic in relation to the social harm, political corruption, and environmental decay that so often accompany rapid economic growth. There is now a retreat from what has come to be criticised as 'market fundamentalism', giving more attention to the overall needs of society, including those individuals and social sectors suffering most from economic dislocation. If this mood persists then there may be less tension between economic development and social integration.

It is even possible that market forces could be engaged in this process. In his speech to the 1999 World Economic Forum at Davos, the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan called on business leaders to implement international standards in the areas of labour conditions, human rights, and environmental protection (Annan 1999). This appeal was premised on voluntary action that would be taken, even in the absence of legal requirements, in countries where business operations were being conducted. It would seem that placing much reliance on such volunteerism, given the pressures of 'the bottom line', is rather naïve, but it is far too soon to tell what the effect might be.



A time of harmony (Au temps de l'harmonie). Painting by Paul Signac 1893/95 in the Town Hall of Montreuil, near Paris, France. AKG Paris

Whatever the results, the seriousness with which the Secretary General posed the challenge suggests that a process of humanising globalisation may be underway, and also that attention to normative factors is already more acceptable than at the time of the Social Summit, only five years ago. For these reasons it seems correct to interpret the ideological atmosphere as more sympathetic to the project of social integration that when it was initially articulated at Copenhagen.

A further signal comes from the electoral process itself. In a series of countries voters have moved away from the more conservative and economicistic candidates, and in the direction of individuals who promise greater sensitivity to societal conditions and to the responsibility of government to dispense public goods.

Whether the policy options available to such leaders can moderate the polarising impacts of globalisation without at the same time weakening competitiveness and eroding its strong growth record remains to be seen.

Finally, there is a growing appreciation that the modern secular state that is neutral with respect to religious and ethnic identification was a momentous achievement. The various forms of extremism associated with the pursuit of religious and ethnic states in different national settings have strengthened the case for a secular state that adheres to human rights and democratic practices. There is also a growing awareness that secularism may have different cultural renderings without losing its essentially non-sectarian character, and that these may include a relation between state and church that is more

integrated than has been the case in the West since the Enlightenment. The important point is that reactions to extremist alternatives to secularism tend to create the sort of political atmosphere that is conducive to the gradual attainment of a socially cohesive society.

The regionalist advance

The recent moves to implement European regionalism have made many observers around the world sensitive to this major experiment in international cooperation across a spectrum of concerns and in the setting of a web of evolving regional institutions, commitments, and identities. The regionalist quest is both one of taking advantage of the opportunities to benefit from participation in the world economy and attempting to construct a political community that softens the interplay between globalisation and fragmentation. The regional setting tends to allow a higher level of positive identity to be realised by minorities, which in turns weakens their insistence on a distinct statehood. It is this insistence that in many circumstances is responsible for the outbreak of severe civic violence.

Such a calming of political passions may also arise because the control of the state no longer seems as decisively linked to the overall prospects for minority well-being as it was earlier. This weakening of secessionist impulses also occurs in response to the more effective realisation of human rights at the regional level. This is partly because such protection operates as a condition of regional entry, which may be an extremely high priority of dominant elites for economic, cultural, and security reasons. It also reflects the ethos of the regional community that can only hope to inspire the trust and participation of its members if it offers a strong sense of respect for diversity.

Whether this respect has cultural boundaries beyond which it is not possible to go, as for instance in the extension of Europe to predominantly Islamic societies has yet to be adequately tested. The evidence does support the view that regional orientations seem more likely to welcome inter-cultural and intra-cultural dialogue to a greater extent than do states confronted by real and imagined challenges to

their central authority structure and territorial integrity.

Perhaps the most important mitigating circumstance is associated with the dissemination of computers and the development of the internet. The possibilities of access to knowledge are virtually limitless, as are the opportunities for networking and communication. Of course, these revolutionary innovations are key features of globalisation. To be sure, they are partly responsible for the negative experience of fragmenting, polarising, and exclusionary tendencies, but they also possess the potential to provide all societies with equalising opportunities of learning and education, as well as facilitating participation in regional and global arenas (Castells 1996–98). The diminishing cost of gaining access to the internet encourages dissemination of both hardware and software to poorer societies and to marginal groups in particular societies. The computer offers great democratising promise, provided the worldwide web continues to be treated mainly as a public resource, and is not absorbed by either the market for commercial benefit or by the state as an instrument of control. Such developments could eliminate the economic disparities associated with the early phases of globalisation, and move the world dramatically in a contrary direction of growing equality among regions, peoples, and individuals.

With the qualifications indicated, the computer and Internet provide the material and symbolic foundations for the practical pursuit of social integration in a world still dominated by sovereign states of uneven endowment, capability, and outlook. There are exciting possibilities of applying these revolutionary innovations to the agenda of social cohesion, without any fundamental shift in the structure and traditions of international relations.

Next steps

Several promising avenues for tangible progress are worth highlighting briefly, with illustrative recommendations for ‘next steps’ that could inform policy options.

Rethinking self-determination

Currently, among the most contested ideas in international life is that of self-determination, which functions simultaneously as a legal, moral, and political norm. Many of the most violent and destructive conflicts of recent decades have been associated with contradictory applications of the principle of self-determination. The formal position within the United Nations has been one associated with the basic right of a people to invoke self-determination to validate the struggle to achieve political independence and territorial sovereignty so long as no dismemberment of an existing state results. The recent break-up of several former federal states has produced dismemberment in the form of a series of new states, and these states have been quickly accepted as new members of international organisations despite the disruption of the territorial unity of former states. The appropriate boundaries for exercising the right of self-determination have become very controversial.

From the perspective of social integration a more flexible, yet principled, view of self-determination would seem to be highly desirable. First of all, there is the basic principle that the full right to self-determination only applies automatically in cases of external or alien rule. Secondly, that where the governance structure of a state is generally legitimate as discussed above, then claims of self-determination must be satisfied by means of self-administration, autonomy and devolution arrangements, and on the basis of minority and group rights without challenging the territorial unity of the sovereign entity. This process of a limited right of self-determination can be conveniently described as 'internal self-determination'. Thirdly, that where the governance of a state is seriously deficient in relation to minority and group rights over a considerable length of time, and efforts to achieve protection by recourse to law have failed, then a people is entitled to pursue a claim of self-determination that includes the possibility of forming a new sovereign state and breaking up the former state.

It would seem beneficial to set forth such normative guidelines at a regional and global level, and to have the International Law Commission or some other expert body reformulate the right of self-determination in light of recent

practice and changing conditions of world order. The main objective would be to encourage the bridging of ethnic, religious, and cultural differences by way of peaceful negotiation and through agreed political bargains carried out by contending parties within the borders of existing states. As with human rights generally, the main role at the international level is to provide the appropriate normative architecture, leaving most of the work of implementation to national institutions and civil society.

Responsible globality

The 1999 World Economic Forum at Davos chose 'responsible globality' as its theme, an explicit acknowledgement that market forces on their own cannot solve the range of problems confronting humanity. Such a retreat from a more unconditional embrace of neo-liberal economic ideas was partly an adjustment to the unexpected depth and breadth of the financial and business crisis afflicting a number of important countries in the world.

The content of responsible globality was not systematically addressed at Davos or elsewhere as yet, although several directions of policy seem to be taking shape. First of all, there are calls for codes of conduct and other *voluntary* patterns of adjustment by businesses, banks, and international financial institutions, and especially for adherence to certain substantive standards in the areas of human rights, environmental protection, and labour policy. As already mentioned, the UN Secretary General put forth such a proposal a few months ago. Secondly, there are strong moves to reform the financial architecture underpinning the world economy, and proposals range from a full-fledged reconvening of governments to agree upon an institutional setting dubbed Bretton Woods II, to far more cosmetic modifications such as greater transparency in the operation of the World Bank and IMF. Among the many issues being discussed these days is the possibility of regulating short-term currency transfers and the establishment of uniform standards for bankruptcy proceedings and for banking operations.

Thirdly, and with little official endorsement as yet, support has been resurfacing for a 'Tobin tax' in some form. This should allow

economically disadvantaged countries to satisfy the basic needs of the most vulnerable parts of their society, and give the UN system somewhat greater financial autonomy to allocate resources to protect the 'global commons' and to channel economic and technical assistance where it is most needed. Fourthly, as with human rights, it is helpful to recognise that consumers and citizen associations can act in various settings to reinforce and implement the mandate to do more to help the poor and save the environment. Fifthly, the content of responsible globality can include within its domain the encouragement of democratisation, by treating economic and social rights as inherent in citizenship, and by endorsing principles and policies that give concrete effect to the injunctions of responsible globality.

Internet access

In line with the analysis set forth above, one of the most effective and cost-efficient ways of mitigating the adverse social effects of globalisation would be to enable the rapid spread of internet access. Such a course would ensure more equal opportunities for all peoples to take advantage of the Information Age and to enable transnational networks to form more easily,

exchange information and ideas, and explore democratic paths to social integration in differing national conditions. Without viewing the internet as a panacea, or overlooking its dangers and disadvantages, it would seem that improved global access on a more egalitarian basis would help set the stage for negotiating a new series of social contracts worldwide. Such a direction of activity responds to the weakening of industrialised labour as an organised force in many societies. The internet offers one way of filling the partial social vacuum that has made it so difficult to convert verbal support for social integration into a viable political project.

Conclusion

Many contending forces are seeking to shape our expectations on the eve of this new millennium. It seems evident that the pursuit of social integration is likely to remain largely a matter for national and sub-national settings, but the international community can help establish a supportive atmosphere. The moves to reassess the impacts of globalisation in the last few years create space for new ideas and proposals, making a serious pursuit of the goals of the Social Summit a much more credible venture than at the time of their utterance in 1995.

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